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NORWICH BULLETIN (CT)
8 March 1981

The CIA's blunders con

This three part Bulletin series on 20 years of CIA estimates of Soviet military capabilities reviews two decades of charges that since the early 1960s the CIA has systematically underestimated Soviet military spending, technical capabilities and weapons deployment.

Today's first installment, "The Security Blanket That Failed," explores the scope of the blunders as seen by a number of experts who have analyzed the reports during both Republican and Democratic Administrations.

Intelligence blunders

Part I:

The security blanket that failed

By WILLIAM F. PARHAM
Bulletin Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — The U.S. government has wasted billions of dollars over the past two decades on inaccurate estimates and forecasts of Soviet military spending and capabilities, according to present and former U.S. intelligence and defense officials.

Ever since the Soviets encouraged the U.S. in the late 1950s to overestimate Soviet deployment and accuracy of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) which led to the famous "missile gap", U.S. Presidents and Congresses have reached arms limits agreements with the Soviets and have determined U.S. defense investments on the basis of inaccurate intelligence about what the Soviets were spending on defense and what weapons they were planning to deploy, strategically as well as tactically, The Bulletin has learned.

The inaccurate intelligence has been the subject of often heated debate within the intelligence community since the mid-1960s, with some critics claiming they were forced out of the CIA for questioning the agency's figures. Recently, more ominous questions have been raised about possible explanations for the errors.

Was it simply the result of bureaucratic bungling or stubbornness on the part of those involved, some of the critics ask. Or was it the result of Soviet deception possibly including "raides" or Soviet agents in high positions in the U.S. government?

Whatever the cause, it is beginning to dawn on Capitol Hill and throughout the new Administration that the money wasted on the poor estimates may be only the tip of a very unpleasant iceberg.

An even more significant cost of the U.S. intelligence community's persistently low estimates may be realized in the hundreds of billions of dollars the U.S. may decide to spend during the 1980s on extremely expensive crash programs, such as the MX missile, to prevent the Soviets from gaining an irreversible military advantage, experts say.

If the crash catch-up programs fail over the next

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President William J. Cas deputy director CIA's analytica mation hearing

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to be even further out in five years than it is now.

— The CIA was apparently caught unawares by the introduction, refinement or deployment quantity or timing of at least 13 major new Soviet weapons systems and technologies.

Also, analysis of the annual Posture Statements of the various Secretaries of Defense against subsequent developments shows the CIA was caught by more rapid or extensive development or deployment than it had expected of numerous systems and technologies, including:

— A large deployment of Soviet medium bombers in the late 1950s and early 1960s;

— A large deployment of medium/intermediate range ballistic missiles (MIRBMs) in the same period;

— The deployment of a second generation of sub-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), SS-N-4s, on a fleet of Yankee-class subs in the mid-1960s;

— The deployment of multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) warheads on ICBMs;

— The development of a third generation of Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), the SS-13,

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